



# CURATING THE METHODS AND APPROACHES OF TEACHING ENGLISH LITERATURE TO ADULTS

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## ABSTRACT

This research article aims to survey the different methods and approaches employed in teaching English literature to the adult/college students. The present paper investigates that which methods and approaches are potential for enhancing students' English literature learning in the classroom. This study contributes to the field of curriculum and pedagogy for reliable learning from the evaluation approaches in the classroom learning. This article tries to explore the techniques in literature classroom. Literature is a content based compulsory subject, such as poetry, prose, drama, etc. This paper reviews several tried and true innovative and exciting ideas for teaching literature in the world language classroom.

**KEY WORDS:** Literature, ELT, ESL, EFL, Pedagogy, Curriculum, Texts, Literary Criticism, Literary Methods, Evaluation.

Literature as content-based subject has given many functions to the students in the learning process. Literary texts have an influential purpose in raising moral and ethical concerns in the classroom. According to Wellek and Warren,

Literature has great function in developing human's feelings, ideas, and interests. In specific, the functions of literature are as follows: the first function is literature gives knowledge of those particularities with which science and philosophy are not concerned. The second function is that literature makes the human perceive what human see, imagine what human already know conceptually or practically. The final function of literature is that literature relieve human either writers or readers from the pressure of emotions (Wellek and Warren 32).

Literature as a subject estimated to be able to give positive impacts, knowledge, great ideas and consciousness to the students when the literary works have written, read, examined or appreciated.

As Miliani argues,

One should not forget that if we are to establish relationships with literature, it is through reading. Unfortunately, this skill has been and is still given rough handling by the educational system, society at large and the learner himself (Miliani 46).

As we know literature is a reading-centered task. Teaching literature cannot work without allowing for the development of the skill of reading. Proficient literary reading however remains a difficulty in the way of teachers and learners because of the absence of reliable techniques and strategies that could facilitate the task. Thus, developing methods and pedagogies to integrate efficient reading skills and strategies in literature course seems to be a very urgent prerequisite. As a result, reading remains the only means and the most efficient skill to enhance the students' capacities in coping with the main part of literature.

The study of literature is important because it improves reading skills. From this involved reading of quality literature a student develops his/her writing skills, as these two skills go hand in hand. It also benefits the expansion of critical thinking and analysis skills through the study of literature. The study of literature also helps students see the world - people, places, things, events through different eyes and by way of a different perspective.

The literature component in English is aimed at increasing students' language proficiency also. It is also helpful in developing the aesthetic sense of the students. Literature in education is aimed at developing the potential of students in a holistic, balanced and integrated manner covering the intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical aspects in order to create a balanced and harmonious human being with high social standards.

In the 1970's and 1980's, the communicative language teaching approach overlooked the role of literature and questioned its contributions to the classroom. Yet, in the last fifteen years, literature has been reconsidered within the language teaching classes. Widdowson, Slater, Mackay, Carter, Long, Brooks, Lazer, Harmer and Hedge are among the most committed supporters to the arrival of literature in the language classroom.

Literature can help learners to develop their understanding of other cultures,

awareness of 'difference' and to develop tolerance and understanding. At the same time literary texts can deal with universal themes such as love, war and loss that are not always covered in the sanitized world of course books.

There are certain important approaches in the teaching of literature. They are as follows:

### 1. The Traditional Approach:

It is because of the special features of academic content of literature and the traditional methods of teaching literature, the role of the teacher in literature course is mostly that of instructor and transmitter. Regarding this view, the teaching of literature in our colleges and universities has become mainly lecture-based with teacher-centred method.

In most literature courses, the teacher/professor first allocates a text for students to read generally before class. Then, in the classroom, the teacher's attention will be centered on the background information and descriptions about some thematic and stylistic features of the text. In this teacher-centered approach, the learners have only few opportunities to do the task by themselves and formulate their own feelings and responses about the reading text. Generally, this approach does not consider the learner much. Learners, thus read large amount of literary works, but whether their capabilities of assimilating, appreciating and analyzing is actually doubtful.

### 2. Language-Based Approach:

Many scholars who have done various studies in the context of language-based approaches (LBA) believe that the teaching of literature highlights the combination of language and literature in classroom teaching. This approach is based on the principle that LBA can provide teaching literature with both literature and language, working in a interdependent relationship.

The dominant aim of language-based approaches is to be learner-centred, activity based and to advance with particular attention to the style of the language in use. It focuses on standard, widely used and widely known processes for enhancing the development of language, competence and understanding. This approach leads to productive use of the language. The activities proposed here are of significant value to language and literature teachers who need more guidance and assistance in applying the available teaching strategies. Surely the teachers would be motivated towards developing their talent in the teaching of literature. Language-based approach helps students pay attention to the way the language is used when studying literature. It is student-centred and activity-based for productive use of language. It improves students' language proficiency, and incorporates literature and language skills among the students. Role play, poetry recital, discussions, forum and debate, dramatic activities, making prediction, brainstorming, rewriting stories ending and summarizing are practiced in this approach.

### 3. Paraphrastic Approach:

The paraphrastic approach deals with the superficial meaning of the text. Teachers who use this approach may paraphrase or re-word the story in a simpler language or even translating it into other languages. This approach can be engaged in assisting students with a better understanding of the text. Activities for this approach could include teacher re-tells the story or a poem using simpler language, the use of translation using other mother tongues and reading paraphrased versions or notes provided in the workbook or by the teacher.

#### 4. Information-Based Approach:

Information-based approach gives knowledge and information to the learners. It is teacher-centred and demands a lot of teacher's input in giving students various contents of literary text like on historical, political, cultural and social background. For example, the students are taught the historical and political background of 16th century for teaching Shakespearean literary works. Knowledge of literature is delivered as a source of information to students. It includes reading from the criticism or notes, explanations and lectures given by teacher for examinations sake.

#### 5. Moral-Philosophical Approach:

Students seek moral values from a particular literary text while reading it. It helps students to be aware of values of moral and philosophical and identify them that lies in their reading. Students need to go beyond the text for moral and philosophical interpretation. With this approach, teachers are able to direct students to achieve self-realization as well as self-understanding while understanding literary works. This approach is useful for such works as Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Man*, which does present an obvious moral philosophy. It is also useful when considering the themes of works (for example, man's inhumanity to man in Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*). Finally, it does not view literature merely as "art" isolated from all moral consequences.

#### 6. Stylistic Approach:

The stylistic approach includes a close reading of its literature contrary to the traditional ways of memorization and imitation. It can prove to be the best method to learn a foreign language through stylistic approach as it would give a close view of the target language. The learners will learn to relate a piece of literary writing to their own experience of language and consequently extend their experience. Literary analysis through stylistic approach encourages in students the ability to infer meanings by interrelating with the text. The stylistic approach demands a close reading and re-reading of a literary text by the students. A close reading and re-readings of a literary text would help the students adopt the rules of the grammar of the target language indirectly. They would be learning language through literature and this is basic aim of teaching literature of any language.

#### 7. Reader-response Approach/Personal-Response Approach:

With respect to the language-based approach, the teacher should not consider the learners as passive recipients, but active participants in extracting meaning from text and then responding to the fundamental messages. Each reader will contribute to the final outcome depending on their anticipations and preceding experience. The teacher's role thus will be that of a moderator to help learners interact with the text. Therefore, the teacher must shift from teacher-centred to a learner centred pedagogy that would allow him to assume a role of facilitator and mediator, in order to lead his learners towards an independent ability to read, integrate and appreciate literary texts.

Literary competence thus refers to a similar mastery and knowledge of the roles and norms of literary discourse. This implies how a literary work, as distinguished from non-literary, is to be read processed and understood. Within literary reading, the reader is very often challenged with a language that uses metaphorical and symbolic meanings which include figures of speech, metaphors, simile, etc. Teachers of literature thus have to acquaint their students with such language use and should encourage them to process any marked deviations from ordinary grammar and language. Moreover, readers should obtain a kind of competence to enable them identify literary genres since each genre will require some specific knowledge on the part of the readers. Thus, reading a poem would activate the reader's knowledge on rhyme, meter, rhythm, alliteration and images while reading a novel would imply readers to concentrate more on plot, characters, point of view, tone and so forth.

Each literary genre positions a particular set of structures which makes it read and handled in a particular way with particular skills and activities. Further, reading a literary text poses a critical problem at literary terminology level or meta-language. Readers then have to be accustomed with the necessary key literary terms to enable them discovering a literary text appropriately. For instance, if readers do not know foregrounding, foreshadowing, irony, apostrophe, etc., they will just rely on literal meanings of words, expressions and sentences that make-up the text.

Literary proficiency depends on the reader's awareness of literary text's devices, techniques and terms used by writers. This implies deviations of literary language, the use of metaphorical language, and the specificities of literary genres, since each genre presents a particular type of reading and knowledge, and literary terminology which helps the reader add meanings that are not apparent through the literal reading of language items.

On the whole, the more a reader is aware of the literary style, devices, techniques, genres and terms, the more literary expert he will be. So, teachers of literature have to consider the importance of literary competence through integrating some tasks and activities in literary course.

#### CLASSIFICATION OF TEXTS:

Before discussing how learners should read and comprehend literary texts, it is

necessary to distinguish it from the other types of text.

There are mainly two types of texts. They are Artistic and Functional. Novel, Short Stories, Essay, Poetry, Drama etc. are considered as artistic texts. Whereas Casual, Personal, Transactional, Reference, Academic, Pedagogical writings are considered as Functional texts.

The literary text is artistic, as opposed to functional text, with five major literary categories which are typically the literary genres: novel and short stories- generally referred to as fiction-, essay, poetry and drama. Functional text comprises six groups:

1. Casual texts include newspapers, magazines and non-fiction
2. Personal texts include letters and diaries.
3. Transactional texts include business letters, legal documents, reports and instructions.
4. Reference texts include dictionaries, catalogues, directories and inventories.
5. Pedagogical texts include text books, encyclopedias.
6. Academic texts include research papers, theses, specialist books and journals.

There are certain useful directions for teaching extensive reading. One of them is selecting interesting and enjoyable works considering the learners' motivation and level. The students should be given the opportunity to choose the works to be read. The teacher can arrange regular meetings between the students in which he stimulates them to read and to show them lists of novels or short stories, and anthologies of poems and plays related to the syllabus then guide them in their choice of title by giving them brief accounts and summaries about the works as well as the author's lives and accomplishments.

Extensive reading should also go without the pressures of tests and marks. The only true test of reading is when a learner starts another new work. Thus, extensive reading done at home should be under the learner's control and not a responsibility imposed by the teacher. Teachers should help their students to create stress-free conditions in order to enhance their love of pleasurable reading.

Another method is writing activities as outcome. It is assumed that extensive reading will naturally lead learners to respond in writing. Students thus can be asked to write short paragraphs showing what they most enjoyed in the story or to write questions they wish to ask their teachers or other students in class or outside. They also can write lists of characters and events and write short accounts or summaries about the significant event or plot. Critical compositions could be opted for but only for advanced students or voluntary presentations this includes research papers and exposés.

Lastly, the noteworthy method to teach literature is 'recording and entertainment'. Teachers have to employ all audio-visual means to enhance the reading aptitudes of their students. Recordings of books read aloud on CDs and watching plays and films based on books, and even inviting visiting teachers to give talks and speech on recently read works seem to be very well-organized platforms for promoting pleasurable reading and fostering the students listening/speaking abilities. Texts can be supplemented by audio-texts, music CDs, film clips, podcasts, all of which enhance even further the richness of the sensory input that students receive.

Literary texts offer a rich source of linguistic input and can help learners to practice the four skills speaking, listening, reading and writing in addition to exemplifying grammatical structures and presenting new vocabulary. Literary texts are representational rather than referential. Referential language connects at only one level and tends to be informational. The representational language of literary texts involves the learners and engages their emotions, as well as their cognitive faculties. Literary works help learners to use their imagination, enhance their empathy for others and lead them to develop their own creativity. Literature lessons can lead to public presentations of student output through posters of student creations e.g. poems, stories or through performances of plays. So for a variety of linguistic, cultural and personal growth reasons, literary texts can be more motivating than the referential ones often used in classrooms.

#### CONCLUSION:

To conclude, teaching literature to the adults has become too much concerned with vocabulary development and comprehension in which the literary text is used as a sample for grammar exercises and paraphrasing. The teacher of literature enjoys a place of a dominant know-all master who supplies ready-made interpretations and views usually taken from writers and critics about literary works. However, it is the time to adapt the new methods and approaches to develop the interest of the students in literature. There is never a 'one way' to study literature but many are there. And it is high time for the teachers to use different methods and approaches as well as use the various teaching aids to make

the literature teaching and learning more stimulating and productive.

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